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From the Office of the Director of Health

Ordinance Reducing Dog Bites, Vicious Dog Complaints and Impoundments

The Springfield-Greene County Health Department reports that dog bites and vicious dog complaints are declining since the implementation of the Pit Bull Ordinance in the City of Springfield two years ago. In 2005 the health department fielded 18 vicious dog complaints, but only eight in 2007. Bites were down from 102 in 2005 to 87 in 2007.

"The data speaks for itself," says director of health Kevin Gipson. "The ordinance is a valuable tool for our animal control staff. It is successfully making our city safer from dog bites and vicious dog attacks."

The ordinance, which requires pit bull owners to register their dogs annually, has also resulted in fewer pit bull dogs being impounded at the Springfield Animal Shelter. In 2005 there were 502 pit bull and pit bull mixes impounded, compared to only 252 in 2007.

"Because we are impounding fewer pit bulls, we've also seen overcrowding in our shelter subside," says assistant director Clay Goddard. "It is the natural tendency of pit bulls to fight, so our animal control staff are forced to segregate them in individual pens. When we have several pit bulls in the shelter simultaneously, this severely limits space for other dogs."

The Pit Bull Ordinance was passed by Springfield City Council on April 17, 2006 and placed certain requirements and restrictions on the owners of pit bull and pit bull mixes residing within city limits. Dogs are required to be spayed or neutered, vaccinated for rabies, microchipped and registered annually with Animal Control. Owners are also required to restrain dogs in fenced areas, inside a home or on a leash with a muzzle while off the owner's property.

The first year the ordinance was enforced, 284 pit bulls were registered. From January through December of 2007, that number dropped to 91.

"The direct result of this ordinance has been fewer pit bulls on our city streets," adds Gipson. "We are a safer and healthier community because of the ordinance and the dedicated Animal Control staff who enforce it every day."

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